



# Investing in Women Is Smart Business – PNG’s Private Sector Leads the Way in Gender Smart Solutions Through the Business Coalition for Women

It is widely agreed in business circles throughout the world that having a gender diverse workforce is an advantage. Gender equity in the workplace contributes to better decision making and problem solving, improved financial performance, greater capacity to adapt to shifts in consumer preferences, healthier team dynamics and organisational culture, as well as greater creativity and innovation necessary for enhanced competitive advantage. However, in PNG, achieving an equal representation of women throughout an organisation – across different jobs and departments, and importantly, at every level from the bottom to the top – is considerably more challenging than in most other countries.

Not only is achieving gender equity a greater challenge in PNG it is also of greater importance. According to the International Monetary Fund, the lack of a qualified workforce, in addition to poor security, is among the top impediments to developing business in PNG. Many industries resort to importing foreign workers at great expense because of the shortage of skilled professionals locally. However, with a labour force participation rate half that of men (only 24 percent of women are employed in the formal sector), women represent PNG’s largest pool of untapped talent.

The reasons the vast majority of PNG businesses are not characterised as gender diverse are many and varied, with just some of these including outdated legislation which prohibits women from working in underground mining and even doing night shifts, less women than men graduating with suitable skill sets and qualifications from the Nation’s educational institutions, traditional cultural expectations that dictate a woman’s priorities are first and foremost her family and home, and some workplaces such as remotely located mining and logging operations having particularly unsafe (and therefore unappealing) reputations. So what is a PNG business to do? It’s no wonder that collectively a number of them literally called for help!

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Gavin Murray PNG Resident Representative of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), part of the World Bank Group, explains the origin of the PNG



Group Business Leaders Launching FSV

Business Coalition for Women. “The establishment of the Coalition grew from the IFC’s response to the PNG business community’s request for assistance on how to ‘do gender better’. In other words, how to recruit, develop and retain its female staff” explains Murray.

Business leaders knew that they weren’t effectively tapping into the country’s pool of female workers, nor were they maximising the value of their own female workforces. “The Coalition wasn’t a case of us going in to PNG with our own ‘gender agenda’” emphasises Murray. “Instead, it was very much about our team listening to what the problems were and working together with the business community in order to come up with a solution that would suit the PNG context.”

The Coalition, established in 2014 with seed funding from the Government of Australia, is a non-profit organisation made up of business members from across PNG. Work of the Coalition addresses three key areas, these being addressing violence against women, enhancing leadership capabilities of women, and developing ‘gender smart’ HR policies and practices. Coalition staff are based in Port Moresby and technical assistance is provided by a team of IFC gender and business specialists.

Together, and with the assistance of its working groups, one for each focus area, the Coalition has developed a suite of practical ‘gender smart’ resources to

assist PNG businesses employ, retain and develop their female staff. Three of these resources include the Family & Sexual Violence Workplace Policy, Gender Smart Safety workplace safety package, and the Certificate IV Course in Leadership & Management.

As with all Coalition resources, these were developed specifically for PNG in PNG by PNG! Though relatively new, and therefore in the early stages of monitoring and evaluation, the resources have received positive feedback from the companies who have purchased and implemented them, as well as the staff who have been directly impacted by them.

## Family & Sexual Violence Workplace Policy

Irrespective of where it occurs, family and sexual violence (FSV) is bad for business (e.g., staff tardiness and absenteeism, poor performance due to emotional or physical trauma, increased recruitment and training costs, additional security requirements). In PNG, a country with some of the highest rates of FSV in the world, it is particularly bad for business.

Unsurprisingly, ninety-three percent of PNG business leaders surveyed by the Coalition in 2014 agreed that FSV was having a negative impact on their business, with additional research estimating that the cost to one particular business was equivalent to approximately 10 percent of its payroll.





The Coalition's Family & Sexual Violence Workplace Policy which comes with implementation guidelines, as well as training and consultancy services to support implementation was developed to help businesses efficiently and compassionately combat FSV and in so doing, mitigate the business costs of FSV.

Catering and camp management company NCS, with 20 operations scattered throughout PNG, piloted the FSV Workplace Policy and was then the first company to implement it in 2016. Managing Director of NCS (and Executive Director of parent company Anitua), John Gethin-Jones revealed that an initial staff survey conducted as part of his company's pilot indicated that 40 percent of his staff were directly affected by FSV, the majority of whom indicated it affected their ability to get to work and/or be productive at work.

"We knew that the violence suffered by our staff was negatively impacting our business but we had never been able to quantify the impact. The Coalition's survey provided us with the business case justification for addressing violence in addition to our own humanitarian justification whereby we just wanted to support our staff and make our workplaces safer."

Gethin-Jones reports that NCS staff now have improved perceptions of safety and that cost savings have been achieved through better staff retention. Several other PNG businesses are now in various stages of the FSV Workplace Policy implementation.

### Gender Smart Safety

The impetus for the development of the Coalition's Gender Smart Safety resources was the realisation that some women were being overlooked for career development opportunities simply because their employers felt that they couldn't guarantee their safety on particular worksites. At times it was a case of companies feeling compelled to not promote the best person for the job!

"The basic premise of a 'gender smart' approach to workplace safety" explains IFC's Amy Luinstra (Gender Program Manager East Asia Pacific) "is that men and women experience workplace safety differently. Our Gender Smart Safety consultant and trainer, Dean Laplonge (Factive Consultancy) teaches businesses how to identify the specific hazards that put women at risk at work and how to mitigate these risks. Importantly, we equip PNG businesses with a sustainable approach to improving women's safety by training their own teams and giving them tools to conduct women's safety audits. They can then use the data from these audits to improve women's safety from one audit period to the next." Twenty different PNG companies helped develop the Coalition's GSS resources which were



Lesieli Taviri, Coalition Chair and CEO Origin Energy.

then piloted by Oil Search, New Britain Palm Oil Ltd, and St Barbara's Simberi Gold Mine, three companies exhibiting leadership with their own women's safety initiatives. Feedback from these companies has been promising, as evident in St Barbara CEO and MD Bob Vassie's confirmation that "the Gender Smart Safety program is already positively impacting the safety of everyone on site."

### Certificate IV Course In Leadership & Management

The Coalition resource proving most popular with PNG businesses across diverse sectors and resulting in almost overnight improvements in staff capabilities and performance is its Certificate IV Course in Leadership & Management. Since its first intake in 2015, 70 women from 15 different businesses had embarked on the training.

Global telecommunications company Digicel, who see the course as complementary to their own Women In Leadership League (WILL) program, enrolled 24 staff from not just PNG but also Fiji, Vanuatu and Samoa. Seven women from NCS and Westpac have already been promoted as a direct result of having undertaken the course, evidence that the course really is develop leadership and management skills in PNG women.

Lesieli Taviri, Origin Energy CEO and Chair of the Coalition, provides insight in to the course's rapid uptake. "There is plenty of leadership talent among PNG women, but it is sometimes difficult to find PNG women who have skills to realise their talent and the confidence to take on leadership roles.

The Coalition developed its Cert IV to help talented female staff serving in or preparing for their first management roles reach their full potential. Of critical importance is that the training takes in to account the specific challenges women managers in PNG face with regard to their career progression - this is no 'off the shelf' or 'one size fits all' training" emphasises Taviri "this is specifically designed for the PNG business context for PNG women." Other



Gavin Murray PNG Resident Representative of the IFC.

reasons for the course's popularity is that it is Australian accredited through the Graduate Business School Melbourne, has no pre-requisites for entry, and is taught by long term PNG company, Wings Education.

The Coalition's resources, including its Family & Sexual Violence Workplace Policy, Gender Smart Safety workplace safety package and the Certificate IV Course in Leadership & Management are available to all of its members. Please phone (+675) 321 7111 for information on how to become a BCFW member and access resources to help your PNG business 'do gender better'.

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The Business Coalition for Women has steadily grown its membership base to 60 companies and its resources are not only utilised by a great diversity of businesses across the country but are increasingly being lauded by these companies as a means to help them achieve their goal of a more gender diverse workforce.

From the perspective of Gavin Murray (PNG Resident Representative of the IFC) "another litmus test as to the success of the Coalition is that IFC donor partners as well as business clients are expressing interest in replicating some of our PNG gender work in other countries.

In fact, this work has already commenced in Solomon Islands and there is interest building to potentially do the same in Fiji. Essentially, it's the PNG business community showing international leadership on how to collectively drive the economic empowerment of women whilst at the same time reaping their own business benefits. This just goes to show that investing in the economic empowerment of women is smart business."

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The Business Coalition for Women is an initiative of the Pacific Partnership. Australia, New Zealand and IFC are working together to stimulate private sector investment and reduce poverty in the Pacific. ●

